



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

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U.S. SEIZES ANTIQUITY STOLEN FROM YEMEN MUSEUM

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and MARTIN D. FICKE, Acting Special Agent in Charge, New York, Department of Homeland Security Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced today that the Government has seized a 3rd century A.D. antiquity that was stolen from a museum in Yemen in July 1994.

According to a civil forfeiture Complaint filed in Manhattan federal court today in support of the seizure, the antiquity, known as a South Arabian alabaster plaque or stele was consigned by Phoenix Ancient Art, S.A. of Switzerland, to Sotheby's in New York for inclusion in an auction to occur in December 2002. According to the Complaint, the consignor advised Sotheby's that the antiquity was from a private English collection. The sale price of the antiquity was estimated by Sotheby's to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

The Complaint alleges that in October 2002,

a Sotheby's researcher discovered a description and photograph of the antiquity in a scholarly volume published in 1977. The scholarly volume indicated that the antiquity, which depicts Dat-Hamim, a goddess of fertility, belonged to the collection of the Aden Museum in Yemen. According to the Complaint, Sotheby's staff then advised the consignor that it had reason to believe the object might have been stolen from the museum. According to the Complaint, Sotheby's further stated that until this issue was resolved with the Museum, the consignor's clear title to the object would be in doubt and would impair its ability to offer the object for sale. Sotheby's further advised that it would be willing, with the consignor's permission, to contact the museum and investigate whether the museum had a valid claim to this object.

The Complaint alleges that in October 2002, the consignor acknowledged that the antiquity could not be offered for sale, but requested that Sotheby's not contact the museum directly, and instead allow it to be able to return the object to the gallery where it was purchased. According to the Complaint, the antiquity was never retrieved by Phoenix Ancient Art, and has remained in Sotheby's custody until the time of the filing of the Complaint today.

According to the Complaint, Yemeni authorities subsequently confirmed that the antiquity was reported to have

been stolen from the Aden Museum in July 1994, during a period of civil unrest in Yemen. Yemeni officials have requested the assistance of the United States government in securing the return of the antiquity to Yemen.

Mr. COMEY praised the United States Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its outstanding investigation of this case. Mr. COMEY also thanked the Republic of Yemen's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and Sotheby's for their assistance.

Assistant United States Attorney EVAN T. BARR is in charge of the case.

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